

E1 They beg our goods, our lands, and our lives

Notes. On 13 June 1612 Abraham Williams sent the English diplomat William Trumbull a copy of this “foolish” libel that he had found in circulation in the Dutch town of Middelburg (HMC Downshire 3.315). Williams’s version—and all the others but one—runs to four lines. The exception, which we give below, was transcribed by the newsmonger John Chamberlain on a scrap of paper that also included libellous material on Robert Cecil. The additional two lines in Chamberlain’s version are very similar to lines 5-8 of the nearly contemporaneous libel “Now doe your selves noe more so deck”, which was written during the last week of June. Chamberlain’s scrap of paper cannot be definitively dated, and thus we cannot determine which libeller lifted the lines from the other. The libel, both with and without the final couplet, makes a series of general and specific charges against the Scots. The specific charges refer to four violent clashes between Englishmen and Scots, three of which took place during the spring and early summer of 1612. Most of the incidents quickly became notorious and collectively contributed to a dangerous escalation of ethnic tension at court and in London. Francis Osborne’s 1658 history of the Jacobean court quotes the four-line version of the libel—noting that these “homely verses...were everywhere posted” (70-71)—and then glosses the poem by narrating the events that lay behind it. Three of the incidents are also widely reported in contemporary newsletters. The events, listed in the order they appear in the libel, were as follows: (1) an incident in March 1612 at the races in Croydon in which a Scot, William Ramsay, struck Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery, on the face (“They whip our Nobles”); (2) an incident at a feast for the Duc de Bouillon in May 1612 during which the Scots courtier James Maxwell quarrelled with James Hawley of the Temple, yanking at Hawley’s earring and making him bleed (“They pinch our Gentry”), a slur which almost resulted in a duel (“send for the benchers”); (3) an incident in which a Scotsman, Murray, and his servants killed a London sergeant (“They stab our sergeants”); (4) finally, and most notoriously, in May 1612, the shooting by assassins hired by the Scots Catholic Robert Crichton, Earl of Sanquhar, of John Turner, an English fencing master who, a number of years previously, had poked out Sanquhar’s eye in swordplay (“pistoll our fencers”).

“Upon the Scottes”

They beg our goods, our lands, and our lives,¹
They whip our Nobles² and lie with their wives,³
They pinch our Gentry,⁴ and send for the benchers,⁵
They stab our sergeants,⁶ and pistoll our fencers.⁷

Leave of proud Scotts thus to undo us,

5

Least we make you as poore as when you came to us.

Source. Chamberlain 1.356 (from PRO SP 14/69/67:I)

Other known sources. *HMC Downshire* 3.315; Osborne 70-71; Bodleian MS Malone 23, p. 4; Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 26, fol. 1r; BL MS Egerton 2230, fol. 70r; BL MS Harley 3991, fol. 126v

E1

¹ *They...lives*: the opening line of the libel focuses on generalized grievances against the Scots, but a contemporary audience could probably have supplied specific examples. The 1608 grant of Sir Walter Raleigh's lands at Sherborne to the Scots favourite Robert Carr, for instance, was widely known and, thanks to Raleigh's own semi-public letter on the loss of his estate, widely resented.

² *whip our Nobles*: William Ramsay's striking of the Earl of Montgomery at the Croydon races.

³ *lie with their wives*: this does not seem to document a specific incident, but probably registers contemporary gossip as well as conforming to an image of the Scots as rapacious consumers of English property and threats to English honour.

⁴ *pinch our Gentry*: James Maxwell's assault on James Hawley.

⁵ *send for the benchers*: Maxwell and friends' calling out of Hawley's fellow lawyers for a duel to settle their dispute.

⁶ *stab our sergeants*: Murray's murder of the London sergeant.

⁷ *pistoll our fencers*: the murder of the fencer John Turner by assassins in the pay of Lord Sanquhar.
